



MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

A half-century ago, bighorn sheep were reintroduced to the badlands in western North Dakota. Today, efforts to provide new members to the population continue via trap and transport from Montana.

While some people argue that we should have more bighorn sheep, I think they've done relatively well, considering the challenges these animals face in an ever-changing environment.

I remember well the first modern-day bighorn sheep hunting season in North Dakota in 1975. I was working for the Game and Fish Department in the Turtle Mountains area when my supervisor, Jim Ragan, received a phone call informing him that he drew a bighorn sheep license. You'd have thought he won a million dollar lottery.

Jim planned and prepared for many months in anticipation of the onetime opportunity to hunt sheep in North Dakota. He eventually harvested a bighorn, but it took some effort and help. Without the effort of people in the past and those of the present, including the Minnesota-Wisconsin Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, we likely wouldn't have that same opportunity today.

Disease

One of my priorities coming into this position was to address the issue of fish and wildlife diseases. While it's inevitable that animals will get sick, it's important to have a healthy population. Healthy habitats help ward off some of the more mundane and common illnesses wildlife populations encounter, but as with humans, there are constantly mutating diseases. The key to minimizing outbreaks that can drastically reduce wildlife populations is constant vigilance. We must also provide quality habitat for animals to help reduce stress – the precursor to almost any disease.

Lottery System

Our big game seasons have ended, but there is still quite a bit of work required to evaluate their effectiveness and whether objectives were met. If you're like me, you might not have drawn the exact license you were after. Even so, the lottery system we employ is fair. It's been tweaked a few times – and could get tweaked some more in the future – to accommodate changes, but overall it's a good system.

Safeguarding CRP

If you've received a survey for any fish or wildlife activity, please take the time to complete and return to the Department. This information is extremely valuable and provides our fish and wildlife managers another piece of the puzzle to effectively manage wildlife populations and ultimately provide the best hunting and fishing possible.

Remember, the fish and wildlife of North Dakota belong to all of us, and we're shouldered with the responsibility of doing what we can to sustain the resource. We may ask that you contact your Congressman on the future of the Farm Bill, which will ultimately affect the Conservation Reserve Program.

North Dakota is home to more than 3 million acres of CRP – habitat that is so very important to our state's fish and wildlife. We stand the chance to lose the majority of those acres in coming years unless something is done. We must all get involved to safeguard the nation's most successful conservation program and its critical habitat base. In doing so, we can help maintain the great variety in hunting and fishing we have in North Dakota.

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